



# Notes from Underground

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Study Guide



Summary

Characters

Literary Devices

Quotes

Quick Quizzes

Essays

Further



Literary Devices  
**Motifs**

Privacy - Terms

**Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.**

## The Wet Snow

It always seems to be snowing in the world the Underground Man inhabits. The falling wet snow is more than simply an element of setting: the monotony of the weather and the dreariness of the snow echoes the changelessness and dreariness of the Underground Man's alienated life. The wet snow also serves to link the parts of the novel that take place in the 1860s (primarily Part I) with the parts that take place in the 1840s (primarily Part II). The Underground Man recalls the story of the dinner with Zverkov and his encounter with Liza because the same wet snow that fell on those days is falling as he composes his *Notes from Underground*.

## L'Homme de la Nature et de la Vérité

The Underground Man is preoccupied with the idea of "*l'homme de la nature et de la vérité*," which is French for "the man of nature and truth." The phrase is a distortion of a sentence from *Confessions* by the eighteenth-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Confessions* is a kind of autobiography meant to present a portrait of its author "exactly from nature and in all its truth." In *Notes from Underground*, this "man of nature and truth" becomes the "unconscious man," the man of action against whom the Underground Man opposes himself. This active man is healthy, single-minded—narrow-minded, according to the Underground Man—and acts according to the laws of nature and reason. The Underground Man disdains this type of man for his blind faith, yet he also feels inferior to such a man, considering himself a "mouse" or an "insect" in comparison. Among the characters in the novel, Zverkov and the unnamed officer both share characteristics of *l'homme de la nature et de la vérité*.

## The Redeemed Prostitute

The motif of the redeemed prostitute was popular in progressive novels, poems, and plays of the mid-nineteenth century. These works frequently involved variations on a standard plot: an altruistic hero rescues a young prostitute from a lifetime of degradation, using rhetoric to awaken the noble instincts that have been buried in her soul. In short, the hero appeals to the prostitute's sense of the "beautiful and lofty."

The Underground Man has absorbed this literary convention, and, wanting to imagine himself the hero of his own story, attempts to rescue the prostitute Liza. This attempt is an ironic one, however. First, it is symptomatic of the Underground Man's desire to "live out" literature in the real world. Moreover, the Underground Man is hardly an appropriate person to rescue anyone, as his own life is as miserable and empty as the lowliest prostitute's.

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Previous section

**Themes**

Next section

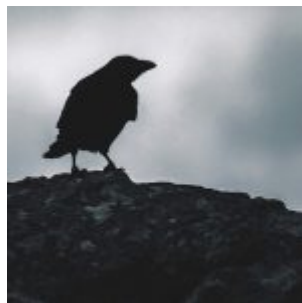
**Symbols**

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**Themes**

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